

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 CU-04 NIC-01 DRC-01 SY-10

USSS-00 OPR-02 OC-06 CCO-00 FBO-01 /148 W

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R 031121Z DEC 73

FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9770

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL KARACHI

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TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: STUDENT RIOTS IN PUNJAB

REF: LAHORE 1450

BEGIN SUMMARY: STUDENT DISTURBANCES IN PUNJAB, WHICH BEGAN IN AFTERMATH OF DEATH OF STUDENT IN MULTAN NOV 28, CONTINUED THROUGHOUT WEEKEND. STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROTESTS WERE REPORTED CONTINUING IN MANY TOWNS, ALBEIT AT DIMINISHED LEVEL, AND SPREAD TO ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS ON DEC 1 AND 2. CONGENOFF WITNESSED SEVERAL INCIDENTS IN SOUTHERN PUNJAB. PROVINCIAL POLITICS HAS BECOME INJECTED INTO SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

1. STUDENT DISTURBANCES CONTINUED DEC 1 AND 2 IN LAHORE, MULTAN, SIALKOT, SAHIWAL, SARGHODA, BAHAWALPUR AND LYALLPUR. DEMONSTRATIONS ALSO SPREAD TO MUZAFFARAGARH, JHANG, OKARA, RAHIM YAR KHAN, DERA GHAZI KHAN AND (POSSIBLY) KHANPUR IN RAHIM YAR KHAN DISTRICT. ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGEABLE GOPUNJAB OFFICIALS, DEMONSTRATIONS OVER WEEKEND DID NOT RESULT IN ANY DEATHS OR SERIOUS INJURIES; NOW WERE ANY MORE BUSES BURNED

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(ONE BUS WAS BURNED IN MULTAN ON NOV 29).

2. IN EFFORT TO DEFUSE SITUATION, CHIEF MIN QTER KHAR FLEW TO MULTAN DEC 1 AND OFFERED PERSONAL CONDOLENCES TO FAMILY OF STUDENT KILLED NOV 28. ON DEC 2 KHAR ISSUED PRESS STATEMENT SAYING HE HAD DECIDED TO RELEASE ALL THOSE ARRESTED BECAUSE STUDENTS HAD REMAINED "PEACEFUL" ON SUNDAY (HOWEVER, GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PAKISTAN TIMES OF DEC 3 ALSO REPORTED THAT MORE "POLITICAL AND STUDENT LEADERS" - MOSTLY FROM TEHRIK-I-ISTIQLAL - WERE ARRESTED IN MULTAN AND MUZAFFARAGARH DEC 2).

3. DPO WAS IN SOUTHERN PUNJAB DURING PAST WEEK AND PERSONALLY WITNESSED STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN MUZAFFARAGARH AND MULTAN. DEMONSTRATION IN MUZAFFARAGARH WAS CONFINED TO COLLEGE CAMPUS AND APPEARED UNDER CONTROL. HOWEVER, LARGE GROUPS OF STUDENTS IN MULTAN WERE RANGING THROUGHOUT CITY, THROWING BRICKS AT POLICE VEHICLES AND CAUSING MINOR DAMAGE IN SEVERAL PLACES. WHILE PASSING THROUGH KHANAWAL, SAHIWAL AND OKARA DPO LEARNED THAT STUDENTS THERE HAD DEMONSTRATED ON DEC 1. AT NOON DEC 1 MULTAN DIVISION COMMISSIONER MOHSIN GAVE DPO FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF STUDENT DISTURBANCES: ON NOV 27, A STUDENT IN MULTAN HAD BEEN PREVENTED FROM ENTERING BUS BY CONDUCTOR, WHO PUSHED BOY TO STREET AND SLIGHTLY INJURED HIM. FOLLOWING DAY STUDENT GATHERED CLASSMATES AND BEGAN PROCESSION TO DELIVER PROTEST TO COMMISSIONER. ALONG WAY, STUDENTS (WHO HAD PICKED UP COLLEAGUES FROM ANOTHER MULTAN COLLEGE) ENCOUNTERED POLICE VAN ON STREET AND, FOR REASONS UNKNOWN TO COMMISSIONER, BEGAN TO STONE VEHICLE, INJURING DRIVER IN PROCESS. POLICEMEN ABANDONED VEHICLE AND RETREATED TO NEARBY POLICE QUARTERS, WHERE WORD QUICKLY SPREAD, CAUSING OFF-DUTY POLICEMEN TO RUSH OUT TO "HANDLE" STUDENTS. IN BRIEF SHOUTING MATCH THAT FOLLOWED, STUDENTS APPARENTLY "GRAVELY INSULTED" POLICEMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES (LATTER COULD APPARENTLY HEAR INSULTS FROM THEIR QUARTERS), ENRAGING POLICEMEN TO POINT THAT THEY BEGAN BEATING UP STUDENTS. AS RESULT, ONE STUDENT WAS KILLED AND TWO OTHERS HOSPITALIZED WITH SERIOUS INJURIES. ON FOLLOWING DAY DURING SYMPATHY PROTEST IN SAHIWAL, STUDENTS COMMANDEERED BUS AND, WHILE TAKING JOY RIDE THROUGH CITY, HAD ACCIDENT IN WHICH STUDENT PASSENGER WAS KILLED. EXAGGERATED OR ERRONEOUS VERSION OF SAHIWAL ACCIDENT QUICKLY SPREAD THROUGH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STUDENT GRAPEVINE IN PROVINCE. THIS, ADDED TO MULTAN INCIDENT, TRIGGERED DEMONSTRATIONS AT ALMOST EVERY COLLEGE. COMMISSIONER PRAISED CHIEF MINISTER'S QUICK APPOINTMENT OF HIGH COURT JUSTICE TO INQUIRE INTO MULTAN INCIDENT AS WELL AS SUSPENSION OF INVOLVED POLICEMEN. HE BELIEVED THOSE ACTIONS WOULD CALM STUDENTS AND THAT TENSION WOULD BLOW OVER "IN NEXT FEW DAYS."

4. WHILE DISTURBANCES ACTUALLY STEMMED FROM DISAGREEMENT

BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TRANSPORT WORKERS, POLITICS AGAIN CAME INTO PICTURE OVER PAST TWO DAYS. FATHER OF STUDENT KILLED IN MULTAN TOLD NEWMEN DEC 1 HE DEPLORED POLITICAL EXPLOITATION OF TRAGIC INCIDENT, SAYING HE HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY TEHRIK-ISTIQLAL WORKERS WHO HAD WISHED TO MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR AIR MARSHALL (RETD) ASGHAR KHAN TO CALL TO EXPRESS CONDOLENCES. HE CLAIMED HE TOLD WORKERS TO ASK ASGHAR NOT TO COME TO HIS RESIDENCE "BECAUSE IT MIGHT CREATE TROUBLE." (HOWEVER, IN SAME INTERVIEW, FATHER INFORMED JOURNALISTS THAT BOTH HE AND HIS LATE SON HAD WORKED FOR PPP.) LIST OF EIGHT PERSONS ARRESTED IN MULTAN AND MUZAFFARGARH ON DEC 2 INDICATED THAT AT LEAST FOUR OF THEM BELONGED TO TEHRIK-ISTIQLAL. ONE OTHERS REPORTEDLY WAS PRESIDENT OF MULTAN MAZDOOR MAJLIS-I-AMAL, AN ANTI-PPP LABOR FRONT. ONLY TWO WERE LISTED AS STUDENTS. DURING DPO'S TRIP IN SOUTH, IT WAS SEVERAL TIMES ALLEGED THAT "LEFTIST" NATIONAL STUDENTS FEDERATION WAS BEHIND CURRENT DISTURBANCES, ALTHOUGH NO REAL EVIDENCE OF NSF ACTIVITY WAS OFFERED.

5. COMMENTD REFTEL NOTED WIDESPREAD FRUSTRATION OVER RISING PRICES OF MASS TRANSPORT. IN ADDITION, STRIFE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND BUS CONDUCTORS HAS BEEN LONG-TERM PROBLEM IN PUNJAB, WITH NUMEROUS CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES. WHILE IT DIFFICULT ASSESS BLAME FOR ANTAGONISMS BETWEEN THESE TWO GROUPS, IT IS APPARENT FROM BRIEF READING OF SITUATION IN MULTAN THAT POLICE IN THAT CITY ALMOST TAKE PRIDE IN ROUGH HANDLING OF STUDENTS, A SITUATION WHICH COULD LEAD TO FURTHER TROUBLES IN FUTURE. MOREOVER, THERE CONTINUES TO BE GOOD POTENTIAL FOR CONTINUING DISTURBANCES IN PUNJAB LAHORE AND MORE POLITICIANS

STEP INTO CURRENT PICTURE.
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